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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION AGITATION CONTINUES AS ELECTION DATE
ANNOUNCED

Classified By: DCM Geeta Pasi, reason para 1.4 c.

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The opposition continues to press wide-ranging demands through the courts and in the streets, but it is unclear whether it is prepared to resume its nationwide blockade. The Election Commission's announcement today that the election will be on January 21 may heighten anxieties that the caretaker government will press forward on elections without addressing other opposition demands. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On November 27, the Election Commission announced that national elections will occur on Sunday, January 21, and that December 10 is the last day for candidates to submit nomination papers. January 21 is six days later than the previously anticipated election date but four days before the end of the 90-day election calendar triggered by the arrival of the caretaker government.

¶3. (SBU) Meanwhile, the High Court deferred until November 29 hearing three petitions filed by opposition leaders challenging President Ahmed's assumption of the chief adviser mantle, his unilateral exercise of executive authority, and any announcement of the election schedule before the voter list issue is resolved.

¶4. (C) Awami League leaders told us the election schedule announcement could fuel opposition agitation. Presidium member Kazi Zafarullah speculated the announcement was rushed to pre-empt a High Court order to delay it, while Central Committee member and MP Surangit Sengupta said renewed agitation on Wednesday, the opposition's latest deadline for action on its demands, seems inevitable. Agitation options, he said, range from continuous sieges of key sites like the Election Commission to a renewed nationwide transportation blockade.

¶5. (C) Saber Hussain Chowdhury, secretary to Awami League president Sheikh Hasina, added: "It seems they deliberately chose the path of confrontation." Party leaders, he said, will meet at 1700 today to discuss next steps but the prevailing mood is one of anger.

¶6. (SBU) Opposition activists held today a four-hour sit-in near the presidency to press their demands. There were no reports of violence.

¶7. (SBU) Two additional Election Commissioners have reportedly been selected and will be officially announced later today. They are Saiful Alam, a former district judge and the recently retired director general of the Anti-Corruption Commission, and former Inspector General of Police Modabbir Hussain Chowdhury. His last government

appointment was as Secretary to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs during the last Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led government.

18. (C) Comment: Today's announcement of the election schedule may suggest the caretaker government plans to press forward with elections without addressing additional opposition demands like the voter list. However, regardless of the court petitions, the Election Commission has been saying for weeks the schedule would be announced by the end of November because further delay would undercut its ability to hold a timely election.

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